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Can George Do It?

BY JOSEPH KRAFT

WASHINGTON—President Ford has finally come up with a passable program for reorganizing the intelligence community. But the effectiveness of the program depends heavily on detailed application in practice.

In particular, it is a question whether George Bush, the director of Central Intelligence, has it in him to establish an evaluative agency of high quality that is distant from both the CIA, with its spy mania, and the White House, with its overwhelming pressure for applause instead of analysis.

To be sure, the President's program includes many different proposals. But most of the new ideas are paper improvements that can be effective only if the basic day-to-day operation works.

That principle includes the Intelligence Oversight Board, made up of three distinguished outsiders; the proposal for a joint congressional oversight committee; the call for a semiannual review, and the development of a full Cabinet committee to replace what used to be the Forty Committee.

In these circumstances, the centerpiece of the new structure is the three-man Committee for Foreign Intelligence, chaired by Bush as director of Central Intelligence. The committee will have control over all the many different agencies in the intelligence community. That includes the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency.

In addition, Bush and his committee are to evaluate the work of the different agencies,

stimulating competition and eliminating duplication. Finally, Bush is to make sure that the White House puts the right questions to the intelligence community—not as so often in the past the kind of questions that cause the intelligence community to support whatever the President takes it into his head to do.

Bush has an exceedingly difficult task ahead of him. He will need to recruit a new staff with an outlook and a home apart from both the CIA and the White House. He himself will have to put the CIA under a deputy so that he can act impartially in judging its conflict with the other intelligence agencies. He will also have to put behind him his partiality to Ford, so the White House can be rapped when it asks the wrong questions or demands a mere imprimatur.

I hope—though I have my doubts—that Bush is up to the job, for other parts of the general package are quite disconcerting. The Federal Bureau of Investigation gets a free hand in domestic counterintelligence activity. And there is no provision for a net assessment—an absolutely essential intelligence function whereby the capabilities and intentions of the other side are measured against our own.

Moreover, the program has been an unconscionably long time coming.

If Bush can deliver the goods, it may all have been worthwhile. If not, the country has paid a terribly heavy price while waiting for the mountain to deliver what is only a mouse.